Step 2. Proposal Abstract

Applicant Name: **Deer Lodge Valley Conservation District**

Project Title: **Upper Little Blackfoot River Restoration Project**

Project Description and Benefits to Restoration:

This project will restore fish habitat, stream channel integrity, and riparian health in a 2.6 mile section of the Little Blackfoot River from Telegraph Creek to the Highway 12 crossing near Elliston. The project area is in need of restoration due to degraded fish habitat, unstable channel geometry, eroding stream banks, degraded riparian vegetation, and infestations of noxious weeds stemming from a combination of the effects of historical floods, past stream channel and stream bank alterations, and livestock over-utilization. An assessment performed on 32 miles of the Little Blackfoot River from the Helena National Forest boundary to the Clark Fork River in 2001 by the Deer Lodge Valley Conservation District ranked this reach of the river as the second highest priority for restoration based on severity of problems, restoration feasibility, and potential for recovery. The highest priority segment of the river will be addressed under a separate restoration project.

In 2005, the Deer Lodge Valley Conservation District completed a stream restoration project plan and an integrated weed management plan for the project area, with partial funding from an Upper Clark Fork Basin Restoration Program project development grant. This project proposal would implement the restoration plan over a five-year period and document its effectiveness in addressing the previously described resource issues. Restoration measures that would be implemented under this project include the following tasks: 1) pre- and post-restoration weed controls, 2) installation of more than 7,000 feet of riparian fencing to allow control of livestock access within the project area, 3) installation of approximately 50 fish habitat improvement structures, 4) stabilization of approximately 2,300 feet of eroding stream banks, 5) adjustments to channel geometry in localized areas, 6) extensive replanting of riparian vegetation, 7) project effectiveness monitoring and documentation, and 8) post-implementation public tours of the project area to demonstrate project effectiveness and restoration methods.

The Upper Little Blackfoot River Restoration Project will "replace" injured resources in the upper Clark Fork Basin through the creation and enhancement of fish, wildlife, and water quality resources equivalent to those that were injured. The project will include the implementation of natural fish habitat improvements structures, channel stabilization, erosion control measures, riparian revegetation, and livestock access controls.

The project will also "replace" injured populations of native and other salmonid fish species. The Little Blackfoot River from its headwaters to its mouth has been identified as a "core area" for native bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), while westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi*) are present throughout the entire Little Blackfoot watershed but in limited numbers. This project will improve habitat for all life stages of westslope cutthroat, bull trout, and other salmonid species in the upper Little Blackfoot River, enhance fish passage to upstream and downstream reaches of the river, increase production of fish food organisms, stabilize stream

banks, restore riparian vegetation and riparian wildlife habitat, decrease sediment loading and in-stream sedimentation, improve water quality, and decrease water temperatures.

Increased recreational opportunities associated with sport fishing will also be realized as a result of this project. The project has the potential to enhance fisheries, water quality, fishing, and recreation for a considerable distance downstream of the project area. The proposed project will also complement the planned restoration of a 2.5-mile section of the lower Little Blackfoot River. Benefits accruing from this project will be maintained over the long term through improved grazing management, ongoing weed control, and continuing monitoring.

The project has an estimated five-year cost of $313,743, of which 24 percent would be derived from matching cash grant or in-kind funding sources. The project would commence with pre-implementation weed controls and riparian fencing in 2007, followed by actual construction during the field season in 2008. Post-project weed controls, livestock management planning, and effectiveness monitoring would continue until at least 2011. Public demonstration tours of the project area would be conducted in 2010.

Anticipated project partners include the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Little Blackfoot Watershed Group, the Tri-State Water Quality Council, the Upper Clark Fork River Basin Steering Committee, and the landowner.